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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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INFORMATION REPORT

COUNTRY China

REPORT

SUBJECT Descriptions and Values of Farm Implements and Residences in the Central Shensi Plain

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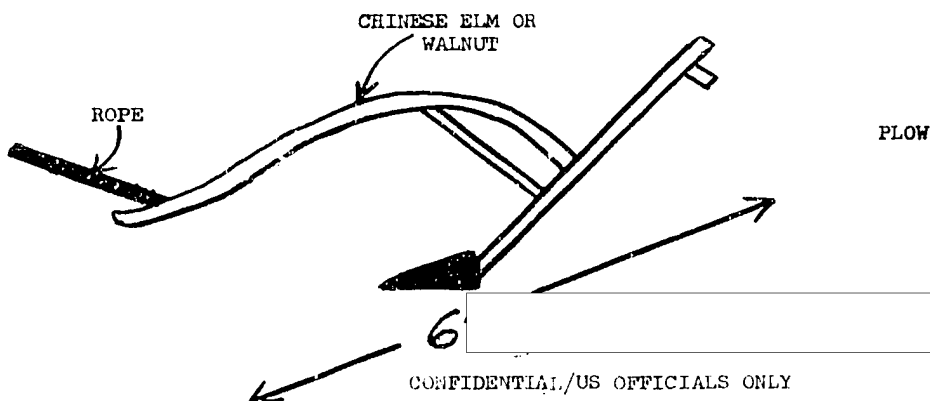
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1. The area to which the following information applies is the central Shensi plain, the region known as Kwanchung and comprising more than half the total area of the province. [redacted] all monetary values in terms of US currency. [redacted]

50X1-HUM

2. Plows. Most of the plows used in Kwanchung were made of Chinese elm and cost about US\$5 new. In some areas walnut was used and these were a little more expensive. Most farmers preferred the lighter weight elm. A good plow could be used for 20 to 30 years, but the blade had to be replaced every three to five years and usually required sharpening after two years use. The blades were made of two pieces of iron, one wrapped around the staff of the plow and the other placed on top to deflect the earth. New blades cost about US\$1. Broader blades used in the rice patties cost a little more than the narrower ones for wheat fields. The same plow-frame was used, however.



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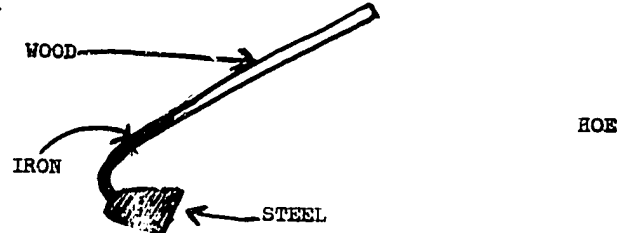
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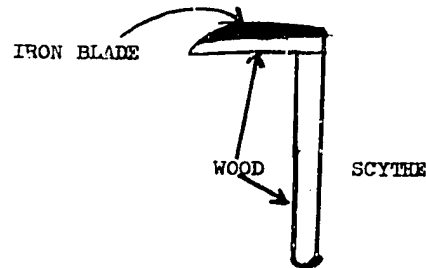
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- 2 -

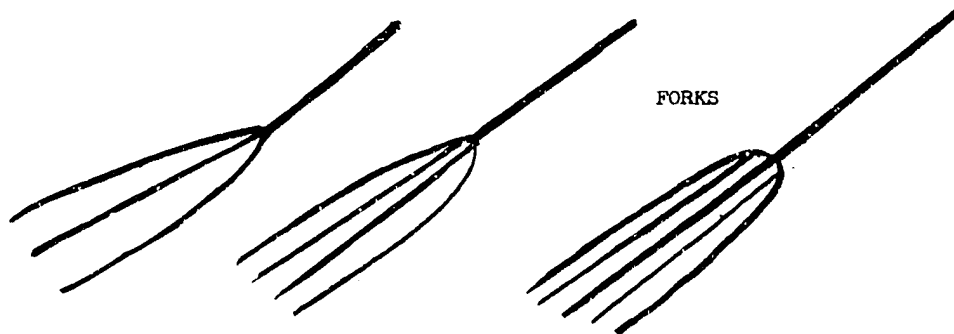
3. Hoes. Kwanchung hoes were made of wood, iron, and steel and cost about US\$1 new. With reasonable care, they could be used for at least ten years, although the blade had to be sharpened every two or three years. The hoes were four to five feet in length.



4. Scythes. Kwanchung scythes had 18 inch wooden handles and narrow six inch iron blades, and could be purchased for US\$.15. Most farmers replaced their scythes every year, but some of the poorer ones replaced only the blades which cost US\$.05.



5. Forks. Wooden forks used for turning wheat on the drying ground were made of willow, because of its lightness, and cost US\$.30-.40 new. Such forks last five years or longer but they were easily broken and rather frequently replaced. Forks with varying numbers of tines were available.



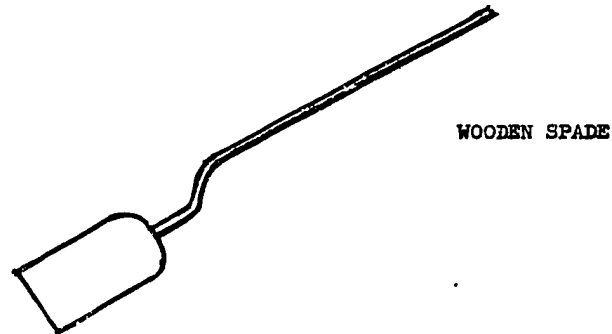
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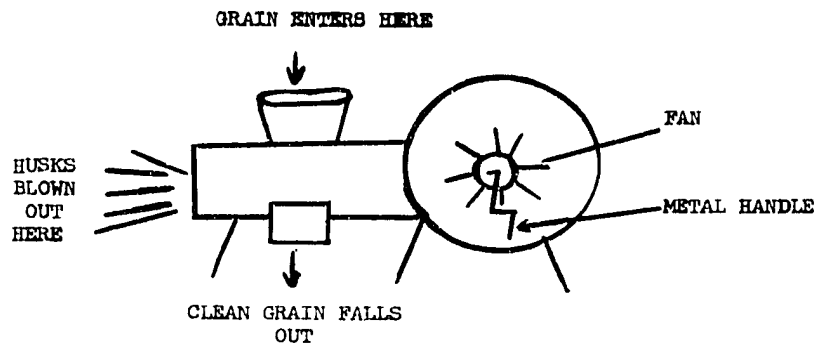
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- 3 -

6. Wooden spades. Thin wooden spades for tossing grain cost US\$.75 and lasted four or five years. Simple as these spades appeared to be, they could not be home produced and had to be made by special carpenters. A properly curved handle was essential and a light wood was always used.



7. Wind machines. (feng ch'e) These are relatively expensive and complicated implements which all the rich farmers had and which the poor farmers were sometimes able to borrow. They were used to remove the outer husks from rice, kaoliang, and millet. They cost from US\$10 to US\$15, depending upon the size and quality.



"WIND MACHINE"

(very rough sketch)

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8. Harrow. This implement was used only in rice paddies and was quite rare in Kwanchung. They were seldom seen even in the farm tool markets and [] the price was [] US\$2 to 3. They lasted for many years. Harrows averaged six or seven feet in length and were usually constructed of heavy wood and iron. [] occasional all-metal model. The farmer stood on the narrow spine of the harrow and was pulled by a draft animal through the paddy field.



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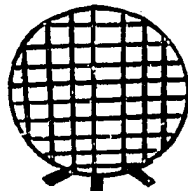
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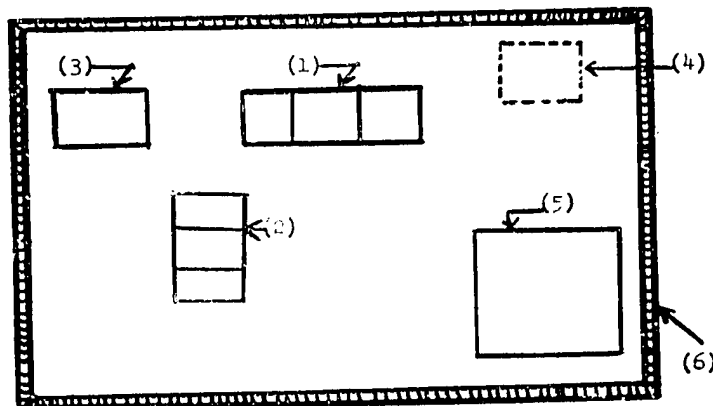
- 4 -

9. Grain sieves. These sieves were made of bamboo, were about two feet in diameter, and were equipped with tripods. The weave varied in fineness and the price ranged from US\$.15 to US\$.40. The sieves were good for two or three years.



GRAIN SIEVES

10. The implements described above are the principal tools which were used in the agricultural economy of Kwanchung. In addition, the equipment of most farmers included bamboo baskets of various shapes and sizes, brooms for drying areas, and several kinds of smaller tools used in vegetable gardening. The commonest and most important of the latter group was a short hoe which could be used in a squatting position to thin out garden crops. It had a metal blade on a 12-18 inch wooden handle. These hoes cost about US\$.60.
11. Farm residences. The average farm family residence in Kwanchung consisted of two living units of three rooms each. If the family had a cow there might also be a small wooden stable. Many farm families kept a hog or two and these were housed in pens of stone or brick, because hogs ruined wooden buildings. Most of the residences were hundreds of years old, the exact age usually unknown to the owner who was merely the latest of a long line of heirs to the property. The houses were built of logs with tile roofs and enclosed by brick walls. Some had straw roofs which needed repairs every year. These houses last indefinitely with regular repairs and the cost of repairs was a minor item of the Kwanchung farmer's living expenses. The farmers did not consider their residences as a part of the cost of production.

AVERAGE
FARM
RESIDENCE

(not drawn to scale)

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| (1) Three-room living unit | (4) Stable (on some, but not all properties of this class) |
| (2) Three-room living unit | (5) Grain drying area |
| (3) Hog pen (stone or brick) | (6) Brick wall |

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- 5 -

The residence of a rich farmer would have an additional three-room living unit and a stable for two or three animals. The house of a poor farmer would consist, typically, of one three-room living unit and possibly a hog pen. If a farmer living in such a house happened to have a cow, the cow would occupy one of the three rooms.

12. In the rural areas of Kwanchung the sale of a farm residence occurred too infrequently for there to be any standard market value for such properties. A reasonably good farmer was not likely to have to sell his place, a practice which was socially frowned upon anyway as disrespectful to his ancestors. Reasons for the occasional sale of farm properties were removal to another area or the need for immediate cash to pay funeral expenses or gambling debts. In such cases the price was determined by individual bargaining in a very narrow market. For the average residence described above the price might be anywhere between a few hundred dollars and a thousand or more in US currency. The replacement cost of such houses varied widely from hsien to hsien with the cost tending to rise as one moved farther away from large towns and cities. The main factor involved in the differential was the availability of materials and special skills. In the city of Sian in 1949 it would have cost from US\$1,000 to US\$1,500 to build an average six-room house on a lot of one mou. In a rural area, say about one hundred miles from Sian, the same residence would probably have cost US\$2,000 to US\$2,500 or more.

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